

# The Metro as an Art Space. Towards a New Mobility Planning

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The following presentation is an extract of my diploma thesis which was presented at the School of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens. The issue is about the idea of utilising the underground transportation network as a multi-stimulus art space. The occasion for dealing with this particular issue was a moment of travel within the city of Athens. I realised then that public transport is confronted with a new challenge, beyond its purely functional specifications as a necessary infrastructure of a modern metropolis. My observations concerned the metro line between Thissio and Monastiraki railway stations, two of the most central stations in Athens. This part of the line represents transcendence in the history of public

transport, since it was here that the railway first went underground in 1895. This was then the first metro line in Athens, but it also constitutes a contact with the history of the place. The electric railway, before going deep under the modern city, passes through the archaeological site of the Athenian market, the centre of the ancient city.

At that moment, another aspect of the structure of transportation emerges. In the modern city of Athens, where monuments, art and history are located in buildings, the metro sets this experience on an entirely new basis by breaking down the boundaries between infrastructure and cultural experience. This ability of the subway seems to be significantly restricted after



Fig. 1: Evangelismos station, built in 2000 by Olympiako Metro, platform level. Photo: Venetsanaki Charikleia, 2018

Fig. 2: Syntagma station, built in 2000 by Olympiako Metro, platform level. Photo: Venetsanaki Charikleia, 2018

Fig. 3: Syntagma station, built in 2000 by Olympiako Metro, entrance level, archaeological findings of the metro excavation. Photo: Venetsanaki Charikleia, 2018

Fig. 4: Larissa station, built in 2000 by Olympiako Metro, platform level, benches in the shape of silhouetted men, made by Giannis Gaitis. Photo: Georgios Makkas, 2001



Fig. 5: Section along the platform level, alternative proposal for the new Akadimia station. Source: Venetsanaki Charikleia

it goes underground. The new place that defines the metro is a modern heterotopia, a parallel world under the urban landscape, which is only connected with the rest of the city at specific sites. Thus, the communication with it is now lost.

The metro network, however, has ever-increasing value and interaction with the everyday life of the city's inhabitants, so that its lines end up in lifelines, corresponding to the wrinkles of the palm, according to Marc Augé. The network of this important infrastructure, nonetheless, provides a strictly sterile experience of recurrent spaces, structured only to serve the absolutely essential function of the transport (Figs. 1, 2). Looking at the metro platforms from the train, the only things that seem to change are the names that identify the space.

The idea of enhancing the metro areas began in Athens in 2000 when archaeological findings discovered at the site during the excavations were first included in the stations. Syntagma is one of those places where a big part of the ancient city came to light after the subway excavations. Today one can see many of those findings in the entrance hall of the station (Fig. 3).

Also, in the same period, works by contemporary Greek art-

ists were placed that served as identifying elements for each station. The most famous artists that took part in this were Giannis Moralis, Alekos Fasianos and Giannis Gaitis: their creations are located in some of the most popular stations (Fig. 4).

The latest trend is the introduction of temporary exhibits or events, which are organised by the administration of the subway. Along with all of this, art has been more closely linked to the subway through the street musicians around its exits, who give a different quality to the transition between city and station.

The idea of organising art events in the subway already existed in other cities around the world, such as Madrid, London and New York, but the success of these events has been strongly questioned. A typical example that questioned the impact of art events on subway users was the social experiment that was carried out at New York's Central Station by one of the world's best musicians in April 2007. Joshua Bell played the violin for about 45 minutes at peak time, when most of the people were on their way to their jobs. During this time, only six people stood for a while, whereas 20 people gave money without stopping. Two days before, the artist had given a concert that was sold out.



Fig. 6: Photorealistic illustration of the platform level at Akadimia station. Source: Venetsanaki Charikleia



Fig. 7: Photorealistic illustration of the transition corridor at Akadimia station. Source: Venetsanaki Charikleia

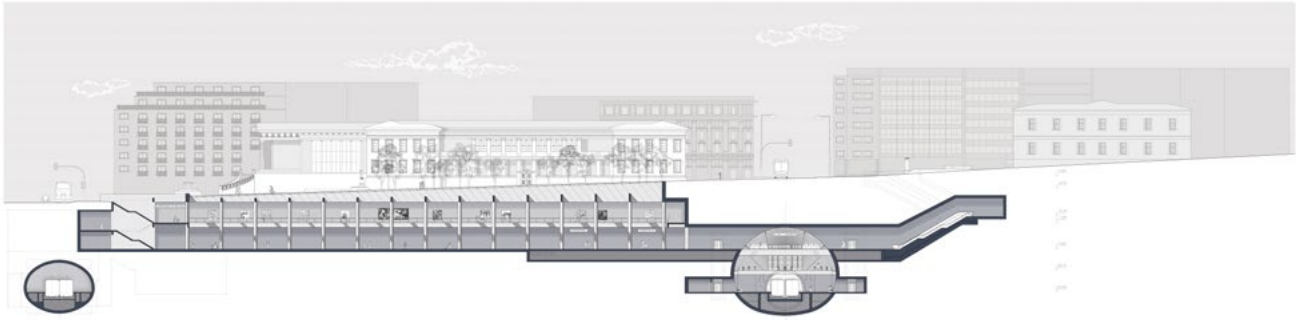


Fig. 8: Section along the transition corridor, alternative proposal for the new Akadimia station. Source: Venetsanaki Charikleia

The idea of that social experiment was to examine whether in an ordinary environment and within the daily rhythms we are able to take note of something great that is happening in front of us, and it proved that we are not. On the contrary, however, there are examples where a street musician, playing at the exit of a station, manages to change the speed of the space and makes the subway travellers stand and listen to his music. The different reactions of the people seem not to depend entirely on art itself. This realisation allows space and time to contribute to the way in which the receiver is responding. If we study on a new basis where space, time, speed, and art are interrelated, a new idea of integration can emerge that is capable of attracting the interest of the travellers.

In the case of Athens, the new idea of incorporating art is consistent with the new metro line. The project of the new line is – at the end of 2019 – in the auction phase for the selection of the contractor company, while the estimated time of completion of the project is eight years. Line 4 will cross some neighbourhoods with the highest density in Athens. The stations – Evangelismos and Akadimia – will serve as connections between the new line and the existing network. For this reason, two new stations will be constructed alongside the existing ones, which will be connected in such a way as to operate as a system. This highlights their importance since they will be used by a considerable number of people on a daily basis. Based on this, these two stations served as case studies in my thesis.

As a common feature, these two stations are integrated into a

network of cultural spaces that surround them. Akadimia station, which was inaugurated in January 2000, is connected with the *Athens Trilogy*, a landmark of the neoclassical period in Athens with a particularly monumental character in a strongly urban environment. In contrast to this, Evangelismos station, which came into use at the same time, is to be incorporated into the cultural centre of Athens, consisting of the Byzantine and War Museum, the National Gallery, the National Research Institute and the Conservatory of Athens. As a connecting substance, all of these buildings have the natural element of the park. This difference in the surroundings requires two completely different approaches.

Each space submits to the user a specific speed that is primarily formed by the purpose of movement and the time of the day. The two stations gather different uses around them. The station of Akadimia is surrounded by commercial and service uses, while Evangelismos station is located between two residential areas. The hours of the day that someone is found in each of the stations remain constant, as well as the reasons why someone goes to these areas. In this way, it is easier to predict if a passenger will be able to stand in front of the stimulus. All these aspects create the need for art to be incorporated into the rhythm of the city and the station.

Each art has different needs, both in terms of duration and rate of movement of the recipient. Thus, it creates a different balance between time and moment, moving and stopping, defining a division between events and exhibitions. After evaluat-



Fig. 9: Section along the entrance level, alternative proposal for the new Evangelismos station. Source: Venetsanaki Charikleia



Fig. 10: Photorealistic illustration of the entrance level at Evangelismos station. Source: Venetsanaki Charikleia



Fig. 12: Photorealistic illustration of the platform level at Evangelismos station. Source: Venetsanaki Charikleia

ing the potential of the site and the requirements of every kind of art, a new design for the metro space is proposed. The new stations would be redesigned with a view to creating spaces in their operating system that disrupt their apparent use, giving a different quality to the movement of the citizens.

Starting with Akadimia station, the design proposed by the construction company is characterised by a basic elongated tunnel running underground between the historic buildings of the Panepistimio and the Akadimia of Athens, linking the new to the existing station. From this elongated corridor the stairs leading to the level of the platforms are organised through sloping tunnels.

The alternative proposal presented here focuses initially on re-designing the motion node that exists in design to create a central location on the platforms. For this configuration, it was decided to open a larger tunnel so that the stairs to the platforms were placed in the same space with them. The descent is organised in two parts that create an intermediate level between them. In this way the space has the necessary theatricality for hosting a musical or theatrical performance at the level above the platforms (Figs. 5, 6).

The new proposal for Akadimia station is also to review the transfer corridor between the two lines, proposing a space of different qualities and speeds. The passageway is widened by including another zone which is organised so that it can be transformed into an exhibition area. Organised parallel to the

basic flow, the space is separated from the rest of the movement through a succession of columns that define a double height place. This space is accessible along its entire length, while it attracts the attention of the user through the natural light. Above the connecting corridor of the two stations another space is organised which complements the exhibition as a more controlled part of it, but is nevertheless a continuation of it. By combining the metro entrances, the two parts of the exhibition space that evolve on different levels organise a circular path such that one can enter the site to visit the exhibition without having to enter the controlled part of the metro station (Figs. 7, 8).

The location of the station is also an important decision since it affects the location of the main entrance, which has the potential to activate the public space around the metro. In the proposed solution, it was considered important that the station be built under the garden of the Akadimia building, so that there is the necessary space to connect the station smoothly to the city level, by creating a public square. Based on this idea, the new Akadimia's garden is organised at a level lower than the street level. This condition is able to completely disengage the individual from the noise and the rhythm of the city.

In the case of the new Evangelismos station, the building is placed in special proximity to the existing one. According to the study of the construction company, the entrance to the new

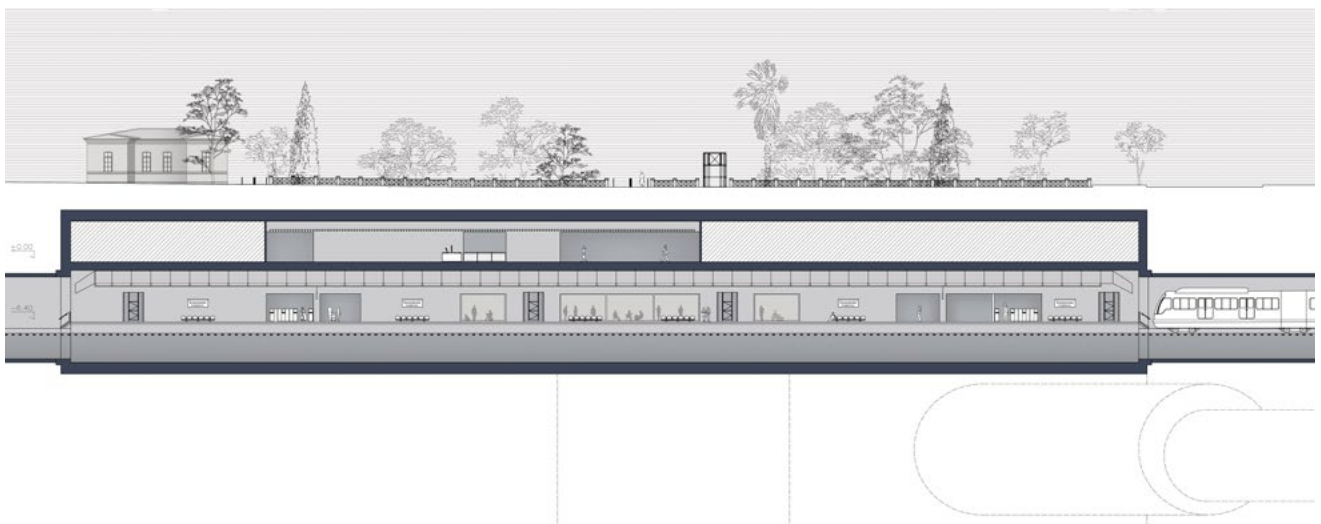


Fig. 11: Section along the platform level, alternative proposal for the new Evangelismos station. Source: Venetsanaki Charikleia

station is located in direct connection to the road, creating a quick access and an equally easy underground transition to the old section, through the new one (Figs. 9, 10).

My proposal for the new Evangelismos station treats the two stations as a single system. At the same time, it reconsiders the idea of easy access from the road to the underground system, as this design proposal overrides the existing relationship with the park. This small green space was brought to life through the connection with the metro station that was built there in 2000 by Olympiako Metro Company. The value of this dynamic relationship comes to define basic design options of the new proposal, which manages this idea to connect the park even more strongly with the flow and life of the station. In the system of the two stations a common central entrance is proposed that will connect the heart of the park with the central space.

Reading the dynamics that will be developed in the particular metro transfer of the two lines, it is recognised that the system of the Evangelismos stations will acquire lower speeds, which was considered a powerful precondition for the creation of a library space within the station (Figs. 11, 12).

Reading is a highly constructive engagement that often accompanies travelling citizens in their daily journeys, especially in this basement that cuts off any kind of potential stimulus. In this way, the inclusion of a library within the metro area can communicate and disseminate this idea while also supporting it through the easy access to a large number of books available in the transport system. The existence of the library in this area is considered to be necessary, so as to communicate to all users in any way that they are moving.

The library is placed in such a way that it faces the entrance of the station so that it can be easily perceived by anyone who is in a hurry. During the transfer, the library is located alongside the movement so that it can be a detour in the person's movement. Thus, the library is also located next to the platforms, so that people have easy access during the time they have to wait and while the library area is visible from the train and communicates, even to those who do not stop at this station. Finally, the library space is also visible from the level of the park, as part of it faces the person descending to the station.

The library's premises are distributed around a central area of the station that is organised as an internal courtyard with trees and natural light from above. The trees of this space come to perforate the roof and make their appearance in the park. In this way the construction of the new station does not destroy the existing park.

I return to where I started: the metro lines are like the wrinkles of the hand on which our lives are written. The metro does not only change time and the way of travelling within the city,

it also changes the perception of what surrounds us and, in this way, changes our lives. However, as Marc Augé writes, "Metro has taught us that you can always change lines and stations and that if you cannot escape from the labyrinth of the network, it can at least offer you a beautiful detour."

### ***Die Metro als Kunstraum. Auf dem Weg zu einer neuen Mobilitätsplanung***

*Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die Potentiale, Qualitäten der modernen Mobilitätsinfrastruktur im Großraum Athen neu zu definieren. Ausgehend von der Beobachtung unterschiedlicher Bewegungsmodi werden die Mobilität innerhalb der U-Bahn und andere Formen der Fortbewegung differenziert. Diese isolierte Betrachtung kann zu neuen Erkenntnissen über die Stadt führen. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist, zu untersuchen, wie die Bewegung innerhalb des U-Bahn-Netzes durch Kunst bereichert werden kann. In diesem Zusammenhang werden zwei Umsteigebahnhöfe der Linie 4 in Athen untersucht. Diese Stationen werden in Entwürfen so umgestaltet, dass künstlerische Akzente innerhalb ihres scheinbar streng funktionalen Betriebssystems entstehen.*

### **Literature**

Marc AUGÉ, In the Metro, London 1986.  
[www.ametro.gr/](http://www.ametro.gr/) (6.10.2019).  
[www.metrostages.gr](http://www.metrostages.gr/) (6.10.2019).

### **Picture Credits**

1–3, 5–12: Venetsanaki Charikleia, 4: Georgios Makkas

<sup>1</sup> AUGÉ, In the Metro, 1986, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Syntagma station was constructed by the architectural department of the engineers' division of Olympiako Metro Company in 2000.

<sup>3</sup> The competent service is called 'metro stages', powered by STASY, the company of urban rail transport: <http://www.metrostages.gr/> (6.10.2019).

<sup>4</sup> ATTIKO METRO A.E. <https://www.ametro.gr/> (6.10.2019).

<sup>5</sup> ATTIKO METRO A.E. <https://www.ametro.gr/> (6.10.2019).

<sup>6</sup> AUGÉ, In the Metro, 1986, p. 71.